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PEAFOWL

CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

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Peafowl are found in nearly every section of the United States on country estates and in parks where they are kept mostly for decorative purposes. The colored variety is our most ornamental fowl. The plumage is of blue, shading into green, bronze, purple, and tan. The beautiful tail of the male with its peacock eyes near the tip is formed by the covert feathers. The quills support the train and are often rattled when the train is spread. The train, which may be 4 feet long, is for courting purposes and is usually shed about July. It takes about 6 months for it to grow in again. The peahen has an iridescent neck and breast but is less beautiful than the male.

History

The peafowl is probably the first of the wildfowl to be domesticated. Its natural abode is southern Asia. It runs wild in Ceylon, Bengal, Java, and Sumatra, where it is hunted for sport. In India, it is sacred to certain castes and the subject of many superstitions.

Varieties

Peafowl are of the genus Pavo and of the sub-family Pavoninae of the pheasant family, Phasianidae. The common peafowl is of the species, Cristatus. There are two recognized varieties, the White and Japanese. The Japanese is blue shouldered. A second species, P. muticus, (Javan) is found in Java and Burma. The females of this species are nearly as gorgeous as the males, having golden-green necks and breasts. The peafowl are thought to have reached Europe through Persia and then to have been taken from there to Africa and to America.

The colored peafowl take a year to mature and the sexes look alike for the first 2 years as the cocks do not attain full plumage until their third year.

Economic Value

Although peafowl are kept mostly for their ornamental value, their feathers are of commercial value. They are used for millinery purposes and for making fans. Because of their ravenous appetite for insects, peafowl are sometimes used to help reduce insect pests in orchards and

incidentally to fertilize them. They also consume an enormous number of seeds and worms. They are reputed to be effective in eradicating snakes, but it has been observed that peacocks and snakes thrive together in their common habitat. Young peafowl make a very delicious table bird. In ancient times the fowl, usually the males, were served in full plumage at banquets or feasts of unusual importance. The birds, having their full plumage, were necessarily mature and the flesh tough and unpalatable.

### Housing

Because peafowl are often noisy at night, they should be located well away from the dwelling. The male has a strong whistle and the female a sharp cry. They are so hardy that they can roost in the trees, even in winter. In the northern sections of the country some artificial shelter is advisable. An open front shed, faced away from the prevailing winds, will serve to protect them from snow and rain. In extremely cold weather and during heavy storms, it is advisable to drive the peafowl into a house or shed for the night. Otherwise, their tails may become frozen fast to the ground. When roosts are provided in the shed, they should be at least 4 feet from the ground so that the tail of the male will not drag on the floor. The roosts must also be far enough away from the walls so that the tails of the male birds will not become injured or broken. If the peafowl are confined, they should have access to a grass run. When first received, they should be confined for about 10 days before being given the run of the place. If peafowl are kept in an enclosed area, young birds should be separated from the males. Males have been known to kill the young chicks. As they are very fond of greens, they should be wired away from kitchen gardens.

### Mating

Peafowl do not mate readily in cold climates. It is usual to mate 3 to 5 hens with one cock.

### Hatching

When the hens are allowed their liberty under natural conditions, they will steal their nests in the same way as turkeys, or guineas. Females rarely lay the first year. Starting the second year, they may lay one to a dozen eggs. When it is desired to have a hen continue laying, and her nest is discovered, simply remove the eggs from the nest as they are laid.

It usually takes 28 days to hatch peafowl eggs but it may vary from 25 to 30 days. The eggs may be artificially incubated. Turkey or chicken hens can be used. If the nest of the peafowl is not discovered and the hen is allowed to hatch her own eggs, she should not be disturbed. It does not take much to discourage her from her job.

It is a good practice to confine the turkey or chicken hen mother to a large coop having a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " wire floor. This coop should be on a good grass run which has been cut short. The coop should be moved frequently.



Young chicks are susceptible to dampness and cool weather. They should be confined during inclement weather and until the dew has dried on the grass in the morning. The turkey or chicken hen mother should be kept cooped for about 6 weeks. If the weather is good, the chicks can be let out after the first week. When the peahen broods her chicks, they are not usually weaned until just before the next breeding season. When turkeys are used for either hatching peafowl eggs or brooding peafowl chicks, the turkey hens should be fed and managed in a similar way to that used when they are used for turkey hatching eggs or brooding poults.

When raising peachicks with chicken hens, it is necessary to provide feed for the chicks as the chicken hen does not range with them as much as either the turkeys or the peahens. The coop for the mother and chicks should be in a sheltered place.

#### Feeding Adult Peafowl

It is only necessary to feed peafowl when the natural supply of feed is limited, usually during the winter months and early spring. Even with ample range and feed, it is a good thing to feed the birds occasionally in order to keep them tame. The common grains and chopped green foods such as are suitable for poultry are satisfactory for peafowl. They should have access to grit and water. The methods of management suitable for turkeys and pheasants are likewise applicable to peafowl.

#### Feeding Peachicks

When the peahen broods her chicks, very little feed is required; a little more when a turkey hen is used; and still more with a chicken hen, as she does not range with them as much. Some of the suitable foods are hard boiled eggs, pheasant or turkey feeds, cracker meal, chopped greens, chick size scratch feeds, or corn and wheat. Three feedings per day should be given at the start. At 1 month or 6 weeks, only the grain mixture in a coarser form need be given.

Peafowl are not difficult to keep and, in general, are treated as another member of the family, the pheasant.



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